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BENIVIENTI'S "ODE OF LOVE" AND SPENSER'S "FOWRE HYMNES"

Jerome Benivieni's *Canzona della Amore celeste et divino* was published about 1488. Benivieni was a disciple of Marsilio Ficino, and his Ode was based on Ficino's neo-Platonic commentary on Plato's *Symposium*. To the Ode itself, Benivieni's friend Pico della Mirandola contributed an elaborate commentary, treating the poem as a *summa* of Platonism, as reconstructed by the Florentine cenacle. So advertised, the Ode with its critical apparatus went through a number of editions, and became internationally celebrated. Pico himself regarded it as a complement to Cavalcanti's famous ode beginning *Donna mi prega*; and failing to perceive any doctrinal difference, held Cavalcanti's ode to have dealt with profane, Benivieni's with sacred, love. In fact, however, each poet treated love of both kinds, but Cavalcanti in the light of Aristotle interpreted by Averroes, Benivieni in the light of Plato interpreted by Ficino after Plotinus.

The influence of Florentine neo-Platonism upon Spenser, and especially upon his "Fowre Hymnes," has been generally recognized, and recently summarized.¹ "The most probable channels of this influence," says Miss Winstanley, "were Marsilio Ficino and Giordano Bruno." In the light of the evidences presented in the following notes, however, it would appear that the direct "channel" was Benivieni, although no doubt Spenser knew Ficino and Bruno as well. The term "Hymne" is used by Spenser in the sense of the Greek—song or paean in honor of a god or hero, especially as colored philosophically in the so-called "Orphic Hymns," or *τέλεται*, hymns of initiation into the mysteries of the Hellenic religion. In this sense, the "Fowre Hymnes" exactly correspond to the philosophic canzoni of Cavalcanti and Benivieni. The term itself Spenser may have taken directly from the Greek, or have borrowed from Ron-sard, by whom it had been shortly before revived.

¹ *The Fowre Hymnes*, ed. by Lilian Winstanley, Cambridge (Eng.), 1907.

The two original "Hymnes in Honour of Love," and "of Beautie," taken together, suggest briefly the dialectic ascent from sensual to intellectual love as it is developed in Benivieni's Canzone, only Spenser's plan of two separate paeans causes some repetition and rearrangement. Broadly speaking, the first "Hymne" carries the dialectic course only as far as the fifth grade of love,¹ that is to Intellectual Beauty as realizable by the mind in its individual and temporal nature; the second "Hymne," however, rises in brief suggestion to the sixth and—short of the mystical "ecstasy"—last grade. Both Spenser and Benivieni barely hint at the seventh grade, in which the soul is merged with God. Spenser is less austere systematically than Benivieni, introducing—at times from Pico's commentary—much didactic and illustrative matter; and he hints in the beginning and end of each "Hymne" at his own very present experience as a scorned lover. Spenser as usual is not content to ride one Pegasus at a time; and so often spurs

Forse di là dal destinato corso

of his model; yet we can, if I mistake not, "without an hound" Benivieni's fine Italian footing trace.

The two later "Hymnes" purge away all suggestion of romantic love, and develop at length the four higher grades of the soul's reascent to God. Thus the "Fowre Hymnes" really constitute one complete doctrinal poem. Benivieni's neo-Platonism is harmonized with Calvinism. The third "Hymne" presents the *man*-Christ as the exemplar of the moral service of true love; the fourth "Hymne" promises the *God*-Christ as the mystic reward of the true lover. "Sapience," the promised "bride" of the soul, represents the God-Chris in the distinct, yet mystically identical, person of the Holy Ghost, conceived as feminine, as the gnostics had conceived the *Pneuma*, or Holy Spirit, and given the place and function of the *Venus-Urania* of the neo-Platonists. "Sapience" is given the external trappings of the glorified Virgin; but of course the Calvinist Spenser cannot identify the Virgin, mother only of the body of Christ, as

the sovaine dearling of the Deity.²

¹ See notes to Benivieni's Ode, stanzas vii-viii.

² Fuller proofs of this interpretation of the "Fowre Hymnes" I have developed elsewhere, but not at present in print.

In 1655 Thomas Stanley translated for his *History of Philosophy* Benivieni's Ode, and selections from Pico's commentary. Stanley's translation, in octosyllabic couplets, is fluent and easy, but hardly attempts to render the subtler meanings of the original.

ODE OF LOVE

COMPOSED BY JEROME BENIVIENTI, FLORENTINE CITIZEN, ACCORDING TO THE
MIND AND OPINION OF PLATONISTS

*Stanza I*¹

Amor, dalle cui man sospes'el freno	Love, from whose hands suspended hang the reins
Del mio cor pende, et nel cui sacro regno	Unto my heart, who in his high empire
Nutrir non hebbe ad sdegno	Scorns not to feed the fire
La fiamma che per lui già in quel fu accessa,	By him enkindled in me long ago,
5 Muove la lingua mia, sforza l'ingegno	Would move my tongue, my faculties inspire
Ad dir di lui quel che l'ardente seno	To tell what my enamored breast retains
Chiude; ma il cor vien meno,	Of him; but courage wanes,
Et la lingua repugna à tanta impresa,	My tongue to utter such high things is slow,
Ne quel ch'en me può, dir ne far difesa;	Balks at the burden, nor excuse can show;
10 Et pur convien che'l mio concetto esprima:	And yet my message it must needs impart,
Forza contro ad maggior forza non vale.	Strength against greater strength availing nought.

LL. 1-8. The poet is given the impulse and the inspiration to reveal the nature of Intellectual Love, by which all his desires are governed, of which his soul has reminiscence, and to which he evermore aspires.

¹[Footnote to *Stanza I*]

Cf. Spenser, "Hymne in Honour of Love," ll. 1 ff.:

Love, that long since hast to thy mighty powre
Perforce subdude my poore captivèd hart,
And, raging now therein with restlesse stowre,
Doeest tyrannize in everie weaker part;
Faine would I seeke to ease my bitter smart
By any service I might do to thee,
Or ought that else might to thee pleasing bee.

Onely I feare my wits, enfeeble late,
Through the sharpe sorrowes which thou hast me bred,
Should faint, and words should faile me to relate
The wondrous triumphs of thy great godhead.
But, if thou wouldst vouchsafe to overspred
Me with the shadow of thy gentle wing,
I should enabled be thy actes to sing.

Cf. also "Hymne of Heavenly Beautie," ll. 6-7:

I faine to tell the things that I behold,
But feele my wits to fail, and tongue to fold.

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|--|---|
| Ma perchè al pigro ingegno amor
quell'ale
Promesso ha, con le qual nel cor
mio in prima
Discese, benchè in cima,
15 Credo per mai partir, dalle sue
piume
Fa nido, quanto el lume
Del suo vivo splendor fia al cor
mio scorta
Spero aprir quel che di lui ascoso
hor porta. | Since Love has promised to my slug-
gish thought
Those wings wherewith he entered
first my breast,
Therein on high to nest,
And thence, methinks, now never to
take flight,—
So in the guiding light
Of his live glory I may still disclose

What of him privily my spirit knows. |
|--|---|

Stanza II¹

- | | |
|--|--|
| Io dico com'amor dal divin fonte
20 Dell' increato ben qua giù s'in-
fonde;
Quando in pria nato, et donde,
Muov' el ciel, l'alme idforma, e 'l
mondo regge;
Come poi ch'entro alli human cor
s'asconde,
Con qual et quanto al ferir dextr'
et pronte
25 Armi, e levar la fronte
Da terra sforz'al ciel l'humana
gregge;
Com'arda, infiammi, advampi;
et con qual legge
Quest'al ciel volga, et quello ad
terra hor pieghi, | I tell how Love from its celestial source
In Primal Good flows to the world of
sense;
When it had birth, and whence,
That moves the heavens, refines the
soul, gives laws
To all; in men's hearts taking residence,

With what arms keen and ready in
resource,
It is the gracious force
Which mortal minds from earth to
heaven draws;
How it may light, warm, burn; and
what the cause
One love may earthward bend, one
heavenward bear, |
|--|--|

Ll. 12-18. Love condescending to the soul, by the same act draws the soul upward to itself. The object of Intellectual Love is Absolute Truth, to which, so far as he is able to follow Love's leading, the poet may attain.

L. 14. *On high*: To indicate the higher, or intellectual, faculties.

Ll. 19-26. The poet will follow in his exposition the descent of Love from God through various intermediaries to the human soul, and then retrace its ascent back again to God by several grades.

Ll. 27-28. *Carnal love*, which we share with the brutes; *intellectual love*, which we may share with the Angels; *human love*, which is a mixture of carnal and intellectual love.

¹ [Footnote to Stanza II]

Cf. Spenser, "Hymne in Honour of Love," ll. 22 ff.:

Come then, O come, thou mightie God of Love, . . .
 Come softly, and my feeble breast inspire
 With gentle furie, kindled of thy fire.

Hor infra questi dua l'inclini et fermi.	A third sustain midway 'twixt earth and heaven.
30 Stanche mie rime et voi languidi e 'nfermi	My feeble rhymes, and ye lame and uneven
Versi, hor ch'en terra sia che per voi preghi!	Verses, for you may there be some to care,
Sì che à più giusti prieghi	So that to worthier prayer
Del' infiammato cor s'inclin' Apollo;	Of kindled heart Apollo may incline;
Troppo aspro giogo el collo	Too heavy for neck of mine
35 Preme: Amor, le promesse penne hor porgi	The yoke: O Love, on my weak wings bestow
All' ale 'nferme, et il camin cieco scorgi!	The promised pinions, and the blind way show!

Stanza III¹

Quando dal vero ciel converso, scende	When from true heaven deflected, ra- diance flows
Nell' angelica mente el divin sole, Che la sua prima prole	To mind angelic from the highest Sun, And to that first-born one

L. 33. *Apollo*: The poet has already invoked Love to be his guide: through loving he will have intelligence of Love. He invokes Apollo that he may express this intelligence with eloquence.

Stanza III: How love is awakened in the spirit of the first created Angel by contemplation of the celestial Venus, that is to say, of the Ideas emanating from the One Truth, which is God.

Ll. 37-46. The angelic mind is the first emanation from God, or perfect Unity; this mind contains implicitly the archetypal Ideas, which are made explicit to it by the illumination of God's love and the ever-growing desire for self-explication kindled and fed by that illumination.

L. 37. *True heaven*: The perfect unity of God, in and for itself.

L. 38. *Highest Sun*: God.

¹ [Footnote to Stanza III]

Ll. 48-52. Cf. Spenser, "Hymne in Honour of Love," 64-65.

Ll. 52-54. Cf. *ibid.*, 50-54. The *prima prole*, or *angelica mente*, or Logos, Spenser in the "Hymne of Heavenly Love" (ll. 29-35) identifies, after St. John, with Christ, God's "eldest sonne and heire" and "firstling of his joy." The Holy Ghost, or

that third from them derived,
Most wise, most holy, most almightie Spright,

(*ibid.*, ll. 38-39)

is here the Christianized equivalent of Benivieni's *alma* (l. 75). In the "Hymne of Heavenly Beautie," "Sapience," the Wisdom of the Angelic Mind, is identified at once with the celestial Venus, and with the Holy Ghost. Ficino had already indicated the former identification. "Since," he says (*Comm. Symp. Plat.*, II, vii), "the Angelic Mind has being, life, and intelligence, they [the Platonists] call its Being, or Essence, Saturn; its Life, Jove; its Intelligence, Venus." The analogy with the Christian Trinity is obvious. The *vero ciel* (l. 37) is indicated by Spenser in the "Hymne of Heavenly Love," ll. 57-60.

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|---|--|
| 40 Sotto le vive frondi illustra e'n-
forma,—
Lei, ch'el suo primo ben ricerca et
vuole
Per innato disio che quell' accende, | Beneath the living leaves gives light
and form,—
This, which its first good longs to look
upon
By natural desire which from that
glows, |
| In lui riflessa prende
Virtù, che'l ricco sen depinge et
forma. | To that, reflected, owes
Power to define its each embosomed
form. |
| 45 Quinc'el primo disio che lei tras-
forma
Al vivo sol dell'increato luce,
Mirabilmente alhor s'incende e'n-
fiamma
Quell' ardor, quell' incendio et
quella fiamma,
Che dalla oscura mente et dalle
luce | That first desire then which would it
transform
Into living sun of uncreated light,
Marvellously enkindles and takes fire:

That heat, that glow, that flaming of
desire,
Which from the dark mind and the
radiant might |
| 50 Presa dal ciel, reluce
Nella angelica mente, e'l primo et
vero
Amor, pio desidero
D'inopia nato et di ricchezza al-
hora
Che di se il ciel facea, chi Cypri
honora. | Of heaven has now made bright
The mind angelic, is the first and true

Love, the desire due
Born then of Want and Wealth when
of the skies
She was conceived, whom Cyprus glori-
fies. |

L. 40. *The living leaves*: According to Diotima, in Plato's *Symposium*, Love was born in the Garden of Jove, on Venus' birthday, of Poros (Wealth) and Penia (Want). "The Garden of Jove," explains Ficino (*In convivium Platonis de amore commentarium*, *Orat.* VI, cap. vii), "signifies the fecundity of the angelic essence, in which, when there descends Poros, i.e., the radiance of God, to union with Penia, i.e., the Want which has been before in the Angel, Love is born." Following out the figure of the Garden, Benivieni means by "living leaves" the archetypal Ideas themselves, which, fostered by Love, are conceived as growing out of the angelic mind itself.

L. 42. *Natural (innato) desire*: Before the mind is illuminated—before, so to speak, it is self-conscious—the desire which is to govern its whole being is only potential; yet once this desire is called into actuality, it is recognized as natural, and no mere accident.

L. 45. *Transform*: The desire of the lover is to become one with the beloved. The ideal aspiration of the Angelic mind is to become one with God, that is, to attain to the Idea of its Ideas, the Unity behind its Diversity.

L. 48. *Dark mind . . . radiant might of heaven*: Cf. notes above, ll. 40, 42. The dark mind, in which Ideas are still implicit only, is the Want (l. 53); the radiant might of heaven is the Wealth (l. 53), of which Love is born.

Ll. 53–54. Love and Beauty (Venus), the object of love, must be born at one and the same time, since they imply one another; yet since Beauty (Venus) occasions Love, Venus is described not only as older, but as the mother of Love.

*Stanza IV*¹

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| <p>55 Questi perchè nell'amorose braccia
Della bella Cyprigna in prima nacque,
Sempre seguir li piacque
L'ardente sol di sua bellezza viva.
Quinc'el primo disio che'n noi si giacque</p> <p>60 Per lui di nuova canapè s'allaccia,

Che l'honorata traccia
Di lui seguendo, al primo ben n'adriva.
Da lui el foco, per cui da lui deriva</p> <p>Ciò ch'en lui vive, in noi s'accende, et dove</p> <p>65 Arde morendo el cor, ardendo cresce.
Per lui el fonte immortal trabocca, ond'esce
Ciò che poi el ciel qua giù formando move.
Da lui converso piove
Quel lume in noi che sopr' à ciel ci tira.</p> | <p>This love, for that he on the amorous breast
Of the fair Cyprian at the first has lain,

To follow still is fain
The starry splendor of her fairest face.
Hence our first stirrings of desire attain</p> <p>Through him an object newly manifest;
And sharing his high quest,
The way to highest good we too retrace.
By him the fire through which his living grace
Distils, in us is lit; in flames whereof</p> <p>The heart consuming dies, yet dying lives.
Through him pours the living fountain, whence derives
What heaven then shaping here below does move.
Diffused is through this Love
That light in us which leads us to the skies.</p> |
|--|---|

Stanza IV: Properties and effects of Intellectual, or Heavenly, Love: how the Ideal Beauty (celestial Venus), emanating from God, irradiates Material Beauty (terrestrial Venus), and how each evokes a corresponding love.

Ll. 55-63. As Intellectual Love, pursuing Intelligible Beauty (of the Ideas), aspires to God, so also Human Love by rising to Intellectual Love.

Ll. 64-65. As the perfection of Intellectual Love is the extinction of Sensual Love, so to live in the spirit we die in the flesh.

Ll. 66-67. Love is the agency through which God creates and moves the physical universe.

¹ [Footnote to Stanza IV]

Ll. 55-58. Cf. Spenser, "Hymne in Honour of Love," ll. 61 ff.:

<p>66-67</p> <p>59-62 } and } 68-72 }</p>	<p>Love, that had now long time securely slept In Venus lap. wanting light to guide his wandring way, His owne faire mother, for all creatures sake, Did lend him light from her owne goodly ray: Then through the world his way he gan to take, The world, that was not till he did it make. [Man] having yet in his deducted spright Some sparks remaining of that heavenly fyre, He is enlumind with that goodly light, Unto like goodly semblant to aspyre.</p>
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|--|---|
| 70 In noi per lui respira
Quel increato sol tanto splendore
Che l'alma infiamma in noi d'eterno amore. | Through him within us rise
Splendors reflected from the sun supernal
Until our souls are lit with love eternal. |
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Stanza V¹

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|---|--|
| Come del primo ben l'eterna
mente
È, vive, intende, intende, muove,
et finge | As from First Good the eternal Intelligence
Is, lives, conceives, so conceives, moves,
creates |
| 75 L'alma: spiega et depinge
Per lei quel sol ch'illustra 'l divin
petto: | The Soul: through her dilates
The shaping sun that lights heaven's
inmost shrine, |

Ll. 70-72. Intellectual Love illuminates our ideas, shadows of the archetypal Ideas, until, the realities taking the place of their shadows, our love becomes as the love of angels, who are illuminated directly by God.

Stanza V: How the World-Soul, by participation in the Ideas of the Intelligible World (the eternal Intelligence), creates the Sensible Universe, reflecting upon it the shadow of the divine Beauty (Earthly Venus), which is the object of Sensual Love.

Ll. 73-75. The archetypal Ideas derive from First Good (i.e., God); the Angelic Mind receives them as they are in themselves *sub specie aeternitatis*; the Rational Soul receives them *sub specie temporis* from the Angelic Mind. The Mind therefore is contemplative, or static; the Soul active, or dynamic; the Mind *is*, the Soul *becomes*. From the Soul (ὁ δημιουργός), then, proceeds that which *becomes*, that is to say, the physical universe, *endowed with motion and sense*.

Ll. 75-80. As the Rational Soul reproduces after her fashion the Ideas reflected in her by the Mind, so the Sensitive Soul expresses, as fully as Matter allows, these reflected Ideas in the physical universe.

¹ [Footnote to Stanza V]

Ll. 73-90. Cf. Spenser, "Hymne in Honour of Beautie," ll. 29 ff.:

What time this worlds great workmaister did cast [i.e., the Demiurge, or Rational Soul]

To make al things such as we now behold,
It seemes that he before his eyes had plast
A goodly paterne, &c. [i.e., the Ideas of *l'eterna mente*]

That wondrous paterne, wheresoere it bee, [L' altra, che dentr'al sol, si specchia all'
ombra
Di quel ch'al contemplar per lei s'advezza.]

Whether in earth layd up in secret store,
Or else in heaven

Is perfect Beautie, which all men adore, &c.

. . . . through infusion of celestiaall powre [. . . . ciò che poi si muove et sente
Per lei mirabilmente
Mosso, sente, vive, opra ogni suo effetto.]

The duller earth 't it quickneth with delight,
And life-full spirits privily doth powre
Through all the parts, that to the lookers sight
They seeme to please. That is thy soveraine might,— [Com' ogni sua ricchezza
Prende dal vivo sol ch'en lei
refulge,
Così sua luce indulge, &c.]

O Cyprian queene, which, flowing from the beame
Of thy bright starre, thou into them doest streame. . . .
Thence to the soule darts amorous desyre, etc.

As Benivieni in ll. 89-90 distinguishes between sacred and profane love according to the two kinds of Beauty, so Spenser at large in ll. 64 ff.

Quinci ciò ch'el pio sen concepe et stringe,	Till from her brooding deeps there emanates
Diffunde; et ciò che poi si muove et sente	That which, endowed with motion then and sense
Per lei mirabilmente	Through her high influence,
80 Mosso, sente, vive, opra ogni suo effetto.	Feels, lives, fulfils its each innate de- sign.
Da lei, come dal ciel nell'intellet- to,	From her, as eke from heaven in mind divine,
Nasce Vener qua giù, la cui bel- lezza	Venus is born below, whose beauty lights
Splende in ciel, vive in terra, el mondo adombra.	The heavens, dwells upon earth, is na- ture's veil,
L'altra, che dentr'al sol, si spec- chia all'ombra	The other, who from the sun is mir- rored pale
85 Di quel ch'al contemplar per lei s'advezza,	In shadow of those whose musing she incites,
Com'ogni sua ricchezza	As she receives her lights
Prende dal vivo sol ch'en lei re- fulge,	Ev'n from the living sun that in her glows,
Così sua luce indulge	So she her light bestows
A questa; et come amor celeste in lei	On this one; and as sacred love is hers,
90 Pende, così el volgar segue costei.	So unto this one love profane defers.

Stanza VI¹

Quando formata in pria dal divin volto,	When at the first in God's own image made,
Per descendere qua giù l'alma si parte,	Down hither to descend the soul de- parts,

Ll. 81-83. As divine, or intellectual, Beauty is the reflection of God, the Idea of Ideas, in the Mind; so earthly, or sensible, Beauty is the reflection in the Sensitive Soul of God also, but as refracted through the interposed mediums of Mind and Rational Soul.

Ll. 84-85. *The other*, celestial Beauty or Venus, is visible to those who in contemplation seek her, but as through the glass, darkly, of their mortality.

Ll. 86-89. Cf. note to ll. 81-83.

Ll. 89-90. *Love profane*, limited to the senses, cannot reach beyond sensible Beauty.

Stanza VI: How, descending into the human heart, the Rational Soul shapes the body, so far as the body's particular material make-up permits, in accordance with her heavenly lights, that is to say, the Ideas in which she participates, modified by the influence of the planet under which the individual was born; and how the resulting beauty of that body, seen by another person, born under a like influence of the planets, awakens love in the soul of that person, whose enamored Imagination then transfigures the image of the beloved one with new and greater beauty.

¹ [Footnote to Stanza VI]

Ll. 91-100. Cf. Spenser, "Hymne in Honour of Beautie," ll. 106-19:

For when the soule, the which derived was,
At first, out of that great immortal Spright,

Dalla più eccelsa parte	She from the highest parts
Ch'alberghi el sol nel cor human	That lodge the sun to man's heart takes
s'imprime;	her way,
95 Dov'esprimendo con mirabil arte	Wherein applying with her subtle arts
Quel valor poi che da sua stella ha	Virtue that from her birth-star is con-
tolto,	veyed,
Et che nel grembo accolto	And lives in the lap laid
Vive di sua celeste spoglie	Of her erst heavenly wealth,—now as
prime,—	she may

Ll. 95-98. The Soul, incarnated, has still reminiscence of her *erst heavenly wealth*, the archetypal Ideas, and after their model she strives to shape the body she inhabits. At the same time she is directly influenced by the planets: thus an individual born under Jove will have a "jovial" temperament, one under Saturn, a "saturnine," one

By whom all live to love, whilome did pas
Downe from the top of purest heavens hight,
To be embodied here, it then tooke light
And lively spirits from that fairest starre,
Which lights the world forth from his fire carre.

Which powre retayning still or more or less,
When she in fleshly seede is eft enraced, [Benivieni: *nel seme human.*]
Through every part she doth the same impresse,
According as the heavens have her graced,
And frames her house, in which she will be placed,
Fit for her selfe, adorning it with spoyle
Of th' heavenly riches which she robd erewhyle. [Benivieni: *sua celeste spoglie prime.*]

100-1. Spenser, *ibid.*, ll. 124-26, 141-47:

And the grosse matter by a soveraine might
Tempers so trim, that it may well be seene
A pallace fit for such a virgin queene.

Yet oft it falles that many a gentle mynde
Dwels in deformed tabernacle drownd,
Either by chaunce, against the course of kynd,
Or through unaptnesse in the substance fownd,
Which it assumed of some stubborne grownd,
That will not yield unto her formes direction, [Benivieni: *repugna al divin culto.*]

But is deform'd with some foule imperfection.

Pico begins his commentary on Stanza VI with an *excursus* (after Ficino) on the nature of Beauty, which, he argues, does not consist in "the material disposition of the body," its proportions and coloring, but in a certain spiritual quality of "grace." Spenser develops the same view in ll. 57 ff. Later in his commentary on this Stanza, Pico declaims against lust of fleshly Beauty; Spenser incorporates a similar sermon in ll. 148-74.

Ll. 102-5. Cf. Spenser, *ibid.*, 183-210 (I quote only the more relevant lines):

Therefore, to make your beautie more appeare,
It you behoves to love, and forth to lay
That heavenly riches which in you ye beare,
That men the more admyre their fountaine may;
For else what booteth that celestiall ray,
If it in darkness be enshrined ever,
That it of loving eyes be vewed never?
But in your choice of loves, this well advize,
That likest to your selves ye them select,
The which your forms first sourse may sympathize. . . .

For love is a celestiall harmonie
Of likely harts composd of starres concent.

Cf. also "Hymne in Honour of Love," ll. 120-24.

Ll. 105-8. Spenser does not, like Benivieni, go twice over the grades of the purification of love. It is more convenient, therefore, to cite the parallels to these lines in connection with the next stanza.

Quanto nel seme human posson sue lime,	With instruments like hers, in human clay
100 Forma suo albergo; in quel fabri- ca et stampa	She frames her house; and that must mould and form
C'hor più, hor men, repugna al di- vin culto.	Which thwarts now more, now less, her high designs.
Indi qual'hor dal sol ch'en lei ne sculto,	Whence sometimes from the sun that in her shines
Scende nell'altrui cor l'infusa stampa,	Into other heart sinks her imprinted form,
Se gli è conforme, advampa	There, if well-matched, to warm
105 L'alma, qual poi ch'en se l'alberga, assai	The soul that meetly lodging it, dis- plays Grade I
Più bella à divin rai	It fairer in the rays
Di sua virtù l'effinge; et di qui nasce	Of her own potency; whence is decreed [Grade II-III]
Ch' amando el cor d' un dolce error si pascce.	That loving hearts on a sweet error feed.

Stanza VII¹

Pascesi el cor d'un dolce error, l'amato	On a sweet error the heart feeds, its dear
110 Obietto in se come in sua prol guardando,	One deeming that which of itself was born; Grade I-III
Talhor poi reformando	May this then readorn

under Mercury, a "mercurial," etc. From the planets, accordingly, proceeds the differentiation of incarnated souls by temperamental types. Further differentiation—sex, character, personal appearance, etc.—is caused by the infinite varieties in the composition of the material elements of the body itself, always therefore more or less irreducible to the ideal type registered in the formative Soul.

Ll. 103-4. *Her form imprinted from the sun that in her shines* is the form of the body she inhabits perfected by the ideal type (the sun that in her shines), so far as its material composition and the planetary influences have permitted.

Ll. 105-8. See notes to Stanza VI. In ll. 102-17 Benivieni traces rapidly and generally the reascent of the Soul guided by Love. After this general sketch, he rebegins the ascent, grade by grade, with l. 117. Stanzas VI, VII, and VIII thus overlap in idea, and form one whole. Pico suggests that the whole poem has thus six parts corresponding in number to the six grades of ascent, and further that the overlapping in idea of stanzas VI, VII, and VIII symbolizes the impropriety of stopping the Soul once on its upward way.

Stanza VII: The reascent of the Soul. After a preliminary and summary outline of the Soul's ascent (ll. 102-17), Benivieni restates the threefold source of Beauty, and then retraces grade by grade the Soul's progress, under Love's guidance, from lowest to highest Beauty.

¹ [Footnote to Stanza VII]

Stanzas VII and VIII are virtually telescoped by Spenser into ll. 211-38, but his plan requires a return to the human plane of love: having climbed with Benivieni the "ladder of love" to "heavenly beautie," he as a lover invests his lady with the radiance

Quell'al lume divin che'n lui n'im- presso, Raro et celestodon, quinc'elevando	With light divine whereof it is pos- sessed— A rare, high gift!—and still thus up- ward borne, May grade by grade to the uncreated sphere	Grade IV
Di grado in grado se nell'increato	Return, whence fashioned were	[Grade V
115 Sol torna, ond'è formato		
Ne quel che nell'amato obietto è'spresso.	All beauties in the loved one manifest.	[Grade VI
Per tre fulgidi specchi un sol da esso	One sun enkindles from that counte- nance blest	
Volto divin raccende ogni beltate	Through three refulgent glasses every grace	
Che la mente, lo spirito, e'l corpo adorna.	That mind and soul and body here adorns.	

L. 113. It is a *rare, high gift* that inspires the Soul to turn aside wholly from the senses to contemplate the divinity which resides in herself.

Ll. 117-19. The one glory of God, variously reflected and refracted through the Angelic nature, or Intelligible World, the Rational nature, Spiritual World, the Corporeal nature, or Sensible World, is the source of beauty in the human mind and soul and body.

of that, thus continuing to the end the "*dolce error*," which Benivieni's "Soul" transcends. I quote Spenser's lines, indicating the closer parallels, though the parallelism of the general argument is even more striking.

True lovers, i.e., those matched by their stars, behold each other ("Hymne in Honour of Beautie," l. 213):

Drawing out of the object of their eyes [i.e., Grade I—Benivieni, ll. 102-5, 120]
A more refyned forme, which they present [Grade II—spoglie ornate reformate (121-22)]
Unto their mind, voide of all blemishment; [Grade III, ll. 123-26]
Which it reducing to her first perfection,
Beholdeth free from flesh's frayle infection.

And then conforming it unto the light, [Grade IV, ll. 111-12.—Talhor poi reformando
Quell'al lume divin
che'n lui n'impres-
so. . .]
Which in it selfe it hath remaining still,
Of that first sunne, yet sparckling in his sight.
Thereof he fashions in his higher skill [ll. 131-34]
An heavenly beautie to his fancies will,
And it embracing in his mind entyre, [Grade V, ll. 138-39—Quinci mentr'el pio cor
l'alme vestige
Segue, entro alla sua
ment'el ved'inserto.]

The mirrour of his owne thought doth admyre.
Which seeing now so inly faire to be, [ll. 127-28—Quinc' Amor l'alm'in quest'e'l cor
deletta;
In lui, com' in suo parto, anchor
vaneggia,]

As outward it appeareth to the eye,
And with his spirits proportion to agree,
He thereon fixeth all his fantasie,
Counting it fairer then it is indeede, [ll. 129-30—Che, mentre el ver vaneggia,
Come raggio di sol sott'acqu'el vede.]
And yet indeede her fairnesse doth excede.
For lovers eyes more sharply sighted bee [l. 108—. . . amando el cor d'un dolce
error si pascet.]
Then other mens. . .

Cf. "Hymne in Honour of Love," ll. 190 ff.

120	Quinci gli occhi, et per gli occh' ove soggiorna	Whence first the eyes, next through these whence sojourns
	L'altra su' ancilla, el cor le spoglie ornate	Its other handmaid, does the heart embrace
	Prend' in lei reformatè,	That fairness, though less base,
	Non però espresse; indi di varie et molte	Not full expressed; until from many fairs
	Beltà, dal corpo sciolte,	The heart from matter tears,
125	Form' un concetto, in cui quel che natura	Is shaped a type, wherein what nature rends
	Divis' ha in tutti, in un pingè e figura.	In all asunder, into one there blends.

Stanza VIII¹

Quinc' Amor l'alm'in quest'e'l cor deletta;	Whence Love in this the heart and soul delight;
In lui, com' in suo parto, anchor vaneggia,	On this, as on their offspring, still they smile,

Ll. 120-26, Grades I-III—In the ascent of the soul, supplementing ll. 102-10. Grade I—The heart embraces the fairness conveyed to it through the eyes, or outer sense; that is, the loved object is physical and external. Grade II—The heart embraces the fairness of the loved object as represented by *its other handmaid*, viz., the Imagination, or inner sense, which renders it *though less base, not full expressed*; that is, the loved object becomes a glorified subjective image, fairer than reality and fully possessed by the lover. It is the *sweet error* of love that it thus in imagination sees the loved object fairer than it is—at least for others. Still, perfect beauty is not *full expressed* in this sensuous image, not even perfect sensuous beauty. The image, however glorified, is of a particular *fairness*, which only participates in, but does not fully *express*, its perfect type: so, as the Greek painter is said to have shaped his perfect type of beautiful woman by combining in one the beauties of a hundred women, the Soul now—Grade III—from *many fairs torn from matter*, i.e., from many subjective images of particular fairness, forms the image, still sensuous indeed, of the type. Continuing the process, the Soul may reach to a conception embracing in one image, at least symbolically, all sensible Beauty—as, to take a modern illustration, Hogarth's "curve of beauty."

Stanza VIII: As in Grade II the *sweet error* of the enamored Heart was to identify the glorified image created by the Imagination with the external object of desire, so now in Grade III the Soul rejoices in the universalized conception of sensible Beauty, still believing the principle of Beauty therein contained to be given her from the Sensible World. But reflecting on this principle, the Soul discovers that the Sensible World has given but the raw material, and that the principle itself of Beauty is of her own making, and is only the reflection of the divine Ideas as conceived by her. Her loved object therefore—Grade IV—wholly withdrawn from Sense, is manifested in her own proper Ideal, namely, Spiritual Beauty or the *Moral* Ideals of Justice, Courage, and Temperance (ll. 131-37). But these Moral Ideals, appropriate to the Soul as *active*, themselves imply standards beyond the sphere of action, namely the

¹ [Footnote to Stanza VIII]

In the "Hymne in Honour of Beautie," Spenser rises only to Grade V—Intellectual Beauty as seen by the Individual Mind, i.e., Truth or Sapience *sub specie temporis*—but in the "Hymne of Heavenly Beautie" he discusses, without reverting to the lower

- 135 Ivi non l'ombra pur ch'en terra There not the shadow that on earth
 fede has been
 Del vero ben ne dia scorge, ma Sole witness of true good, the heart
 certo shall find,
 Lume et del vero sol più ver'effige. But clear light and the true Sun's image
 true.
 Quinci mentr'el pio cor l'alme ves- If gentle heart those sacred signs pur-
 tige sue,
 Segue, entro alla sua ment'el ved' It finds that image planted in the mind;
 inserto;
 140 Indi à piu chiaro et aperto Thence soars to more refined
 Lum' appresso ad quel sol sospeso And pure light circumfused about that
 vola, sun
 Dalla cui viva et sola By whose eternal, one
 Luce informat' amando si fa bello Glory illumined, loving, are made fair
 La mente, l'alma e'l mondo et ciò The mind, the soul, the world, and all
 ch'è'n quello. things there.

Stanza IX

- 145 Canzon, io sento Amor ch'el fren O song of mine, I feel Love drawing
 raccoglie rein
 Al temerario ardir ch'el cor mio On the rash ardors that my spirit move
 sprona
 Forse di là dal destinato corso: Beyond the path appointed to aspire:
 Rafrena el van disio, restring'el He applies the curb; he checks the vain
 morso. desire.
 Et casti orecchi à quel ch'amor rag- And now chaste ears to all that speak
 iona of love

LL. 135-36. Sensible Beauty is only the *shadow of true good*, or Divine Beauty; but the shadow is the only earthly witness of that, as the Love it excites is the only earthly impulse which leads the Soul upward.

L. 137. *Image true*: The Soul's Moral Beauty faithfully embodies true Beauty, but in the sphere of action, or "becoming," which is lower than the sphere of contemplation, or "being."

LL. 142-44; cf. l. 117-19.

LL. 145-48. The Intelligible World of Ideas, to which the desirous Soul has by intuition risen, is itself not the *full expression* (cf. l. 123) of Ideal Beauty. The eternal and universal Ideas which constitute and form it, form *together* the Absolute Truth in itself; but in their self-consciousness—i.e., the Universal, or Angelic, Mind—they appear not as One, but as Many. Their Unity, or "togetherness," is God; and God, as perfect Unity, cannot be self-conscious, since self-consciousness distinguishes itself as subject and object, is *ipso facto* a violation of Unity. While there is self-consciousness, therefore, union of the Soul with God Himself is unattainable. Plotinus, indeed, and other mystics have found in *Ecstasy*, a state of the Soul in which self-consciousness is lost, a possibility of such union even during this life; but from consideration of that "Sabbath" of the Soul Benivieni abstains; enough to consider her "six day's labor."

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|-----|-----------------------------------|--|
| 150 | Hor volgi; se persona | Turn thou; and if there prove |
| | Truovi che dal tu'amor s'inform- | One by thy love informed and gar- |
| | 'et vesta | mented, |
| | Non pur le frondi à questa | Before him do not spread |
| | Del tuo divin thesor, ma'l frutto | Thy garner's frondage only, but its |
| | spiega; | fruit; |
| | Agli altri basti l'un, ma l'altro | The first alone vouchsafe to other suit. |
| | niega. | |
-

Ll. 153-54. Cf. Dante (Canz. "Voi che intendendo," Envoy):
 O song of mine, methinks they shall be rare
 Who may thee rightly understand in all,
 So intricate and subtle is thy skill:
 Wherefore if peradventure it befall
 That thou in presence of such folk shalt fare
 As seem to understand thy meaning ill,
 I pray thee then that thou take comfort still,
 Saying, my youngest well-beloved, to them:
 "Consider, at least, how beautiful I am."

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